THOMAS MOULTON
Pioneer of 1856

Thomas G. Hawkins, great-grandson
President, Olympus Hills Chapter

Thomas Moulton was born 10 November 1810 at Irchester, England. He was the son of William and Sarah Horne Moulton and his father died when Thomas was 2 years of age. Because of his father's premature death, Thomas was forced early in life to become a child laborer, living 14 years with a family named Tunnel.

At the age of 22 Thomas married Esther Marsh who was eight years his senior. They had two daughters: Susan, born in 1834 and died two years later; and Sarah, born March 5, 1837.

On February 25, 1839, Esther Marsh Moulton died, leaving her husband and two year old daughter Sarah. In April, 1840, Thomas Moulton married his second wife Sarah Denton. She was the daughter of Charles Denton and Charlotte Bassfield.

By 1838 several branches of the Church had been organized in England. The missionaries were making many converts to the Church. Thomas Moulton and his wife had become interested in the Latter-day Saint teachings and were baptized December 29, 1841. However, it was not until 1856 that they were able to emigrate. In the meantime, their first six children were born in Irchester, England. The children were: Mary Ann, William Denton, Joseph, James Heber, Charlotte and Sofia Elizabeth.

In England, Thomas Moulton was a farm laborer, and the undertaking of preparations for emigration of a family of nine with a new member momentarily expected was no small task. Sarah, his oldest daughter by Esther Marsh, was now a young lady of 19. His other six children, by Sarah Denton, ranged in age from three to fifteen.

On May 3, 1856, the Moulton family set sail on the ship "Thornton" from England with 764 passengers.

While crossing the Irish Sea, Sarah Denton gave birth to her seventh child, Charles Alma. After a six-week trip by water, the family of ten, arrived in New York harbor on June 14, 1856, and embarked by railroad for Winter Quarters, later leaving for Iowa City, where they arrived on June 26.

Upon arrival in Iowa City they found the handcarts were not ready, which caused three weeks delay. Two hundred and fifty handcarts had to be made, many of them from green, unseasoned lumber, and were unable to stand the strenuous test that they were subjected to. Several carts had to be abandoned on the plains.

The Thomas Moulton family was assigned to the James C. Willey company, composed of 500 saints, including more than the usual number of aged.

The first 200 miles of their journey was over beautiful grassy plains, with flowers and wild fruits and plenty of fish in the streams.

When they reached Florence, Nebraska, it was necessary to repair many of the carts. Some couldn't be repaired and had to be left by the wayside. The travelers were becoming tired and weary and unable to push or pull the heavily-loaded carts. All unnecessary things were discarded. The wagons and cattle were taken by the Indians, and provisions were becoming so low that food had to be rationed. Many became ill and deaths increased daily. Along with these and other difficulties, winter set in early and men, women and children were forced to wade through freezing streams, and to sleep in the open with insufficient bedding. Through deep snows, piercing winds and freezing temperatures the company struggled on. Sixty-six of their number died.

Some Mormon missionaries returning from England overtook and passed the company and reported its plight to the Church presidency in Salt Lake City Immediately rescue parties were sent out carrying wagon loads of provisions, clothing and bedding.

The Moulton family arrived in Salt Lake City on November 9, 1856, without losing one member of their family. However, their third son, Heber, had had several fingers on his left hand frozen so badly that they had to be amputated on reaching Salt Lake.

On December 5, 1856, their oldest daughter, Sarah, was married to John Bennett Hawkins, an established blacksmith, who had been a member of the rescue party sent out by President Young. They made their home in Salt Lake City, where they became a prosperous and influential family.

Three weeks later the Thomas Moulton family moved to Provo, where he worked as a farm laborer. Here their eighth child was born, Thomas Denton, on October 29, 1858. He died 10 months later. Here also their daughter, Mary Ann, was married to Fredrick Giles. She was the mother of Fredrick W., John T. and Sarah Giles Mahoney. Mary Ann and Fredrick moved to Heber, where she died at the age of 28.

In 1860 the Moulton family moved from Provo to Heber. As the settlers were having trouble with the Indians, they took refuge in the log fort built in 1859 and 1860.

On September 16, 1860, their ninth child, John E., was born and three years later the tenth and last, George Franklin. After moving from the fort, Thomas Moulton built the rock house on Second North and Second West. He and his wife were both systematic and methodical in their work and planning. They did their share in helping to pioneer Heber Valley.

Before leaving England, Thomas Moulton felt a little hesitant about undertaking such a long and strenuous journey. His wife went to see one of the brethren, who gave her a blessing. He promised her that she would make the journey safely without the loss of one member of her family. Although their trials were severe and the baby, Charles, reduced to a near skeleton, their children who crossed the plains married and reared families.

He was a Blackhawk War veteran in the infantry company of John Gallager.

Sarah Denton Moulton died July 7, 1888 at Heber, and her husband, Thomas, on April 17, 1892.

Reference: "How Beautiful Upon the Mountains", p. 526-527. Wasatch County- Daughters of Utah Pioneers ❑